

**PLACE OF MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE IN ISLAMIC
SHARIAH/LAW AND THE CONTEMPORARY WORLD**

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Abstract: *Today, the picture of Sharia conceived by the Western population in general is so negative that one could call it Islamophobia. Articles written on "sword verses" extracted from Quran such as Surah Tauba verse 9/ (9:5) to demonstrate that there is no room for religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue in Islam and Muslims cannot be loyal citizens in a non-Islamic state are aimed at developing theories of hate and legitimating discrimination against Muslims. But the fact is that Islam is a faith of peace and pluralism. Its core values are compassion, mutual respect, acceptance and freedom of religion. The Holy Quran and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) are a clear testimony to this. History indicates a long tradition of interreligious harmony and dialogue between Muslims and Christians. This paper focuses on the necessity and general principles for holding dialogues and the way in which dialogue should be conducted between Muslims and Christians. It analyses the views of certain Islamic scholars who quote the Holy Quran and say Christians cannot be friends of Muslims. In recent years, some efforts have been made by prominent people and groups of specialists from among Christians and Muslims towards constructive and meaningful dialogue in order to try and explore the common values such as peace, justice, mercy etc. The aim has been to build a pluralistic environment to contribute towards a common future for people of the both faiths and prevent conflict at present and in future.*

Image of Shariah in the West: A Western Muslim scholar Tariq Ramadan analyses the perception of Shariah held by people in the West. He says, "In the West the idea of Sharia calls up all the darkest images of Islam." (1) Asghar Ali, an Indian scholar writes: "Many people talk about progressive Islam but "Is progressive Islam possible? is the question most sceptics ask -----It is not surprising as *Shari'ah* based rigid Islam and the Quran based liberal Islam make all the difference." (2) If Muslims want fruitful dialogue and to bridge the gaps we need to remove the misconceptions in the minds of Christians and people of other faiths, regarding issues related to *Shari'ah* such as relations with non-Muslims.

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PLACE OF MUSLIM AND CHRISTIAN DIALOGUE

What is Shariah? The word *Shari'ah* derived from the root *Sha-ra-a* its more general meaning is referred to “the path that leads to the spring.”(3) It also means “God’s eternal and immutable will for humanity, as expressed in the Quran and Muhammad’s (PBUH) example (Sunnah), considered binding for all believers; ideal Islamic Laws.”

Necessity of interfaith dialogue and alliance among Abrahamic Traditions: Three religious communities which are deeply into it are those of Islam, Judaism and Christianity due to misunderstandings and intolerance. The clash has become the clash of civilization – Islamic civilizations versus other civilizations. Today more than ever we need understanding of each other via constructive dialogue because this fact is accepted by all researchers that “Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all are known as models of “ethical monotheism.” (4) “Almost all “experts,” for various reasons, agree that humanity has reached a critical juncture: the current confrontation between Muslim society and the West. On both sides, there are those who believe that the future salvation or ruin of humanity may hang in the balance.”(5)

Justification of Islamo-Christian dialogue: Allah addressed mankind Holy Quran and commanded his Prophet (PBUH) for dialogue. Dialoguing is the tradition of all Prophets including Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) with complete humility. The Holy Prophet (PBUH) had a dialogue with people of different faiths at all levels, kings, nobles, tribal heads, the rich and the poor He taught ethics and principles for holding dialogue. He gave permission to his companions to hold dialogue for Dawah and remove misconceptions about Islam from the minds of people of the world.

First Islamo-Christian intercontinental dialogue and alliance in History:

First Muslim –Christian dialogue took place in Abyssinia (Ethiopia) in 615 AD between the Muslim emigrants of Asia (the Middle East) and Christians of Africa at the time of Holy Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). It was a very fruitful session. Jafer Tyyar (RA) represented the Muslim community. After the successful dialogue Muslims were given political asylum by the Christian ruler. Principles of alliance were common.

Prophet’s letter to the king of Ethiopia:

“In the name of Allah, the Merciful, the Beneficent, from Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah to the king of Ethiopia, Al-Najashi Al- Assham. You are in peace. I send you the greetings of Allah. It is He. There is no God but Himself. He is the Sovereign, the Holy One, the source of peace, the Guardian of Faith, the Preserver of safety. I bear witness that Jesus, the son of Mary is the spirit of Allah and His word. He bestowed it to Mary the devoted, the good and the virgin. She carried Jesus. Allah created him from His spirit and His breath as He

created Adam with His Hand and His Breath. I invite you to Allah the Unique who has no partner; and to continue to obey Him; and that you follow me, and believe in what I received. I am the Messenger of Allah .I sent you my cousin Jaafar with a group of Muslims. When they reach you, treat them with respect and don't be obstinate from transgressor. I invite you and your soldiers to Allah. I have already informed (you) and advised (you of the true path). Accept my advice. And peace is on those who accepted guidance.”(6)

Contextual and textual analyses:

Dr Ghazi has quoted Dr Hamidullah views on this letter that this kind of correspondence can be done only between people who are acquainted with each other. The friendly language of the letter makes Dr Hamidullah speculate that the Prophet (PBUH) might have met the king earlier. According to authentic sources, we know that there were business ties between the family of the Prophet(PBUH) and the king of Ethiopia. According to some other sources, the Prophet (PBUH) used Habashi words and communicated in this language with people of Abyssinia. (7) Furthermore, the text of the king's reply (8) affirms the speculation of Dr Hamidullah that there had been connections between them in early days.

The text of the letter is based on:

1. Oneness of Allah and Prophethood (PBUH).
2. The true status of Jesus and Virgin Mary.
3. And Invitation and advice for peace.

A piece of advice to Jaafar bin Abi Talib (RA) by Holy Prophet (PBUH):

“You migrate to Ethiopia and live there till Allah relieves the hardship you face here as that is the land of justice and truth. There is a king who loves justice; no one is treated unjustly by him.”(9)

Content analyses:

1. Words “ Land of truth” Great example of acceptance of other peoples and faiths
2. Certification of truthfulness for the non- Arab, Christian ruler, whose language, religion, and culture are different from his (the Prophet's).
3. Lesson to the entire Muslim community to appreciate truth and justice, everywhere by everyone.
4. Praise of King in such a way shows unbiased and unprejudiced attitude towards people of other faiths.
5. This has to be noted this praise” who loves justice; no one is treated unjustly by him” for the king was done when he had not accepted Islam.

Speech of Jaafar bin Abi Talib(AR) in the palace of king of Ethopia:

“O King, we were an uncivilized people, worshipping idols, eating corpses, committing abominations, breaking natural ties, treating guests badly and our strong devoured our weak. Thus we were until God sent us an apostle whose lineage, truth, trustworthiness and clemency we know. He summoned us to acknowledge God’s unity and to worship him and to renounce the stones and images which we and our fathers formerly worshiped. He commanded us to speak the truth, be faithful to our engagements, mindful of the ties of kinship and kindly hospitality, and to refrain from crimes and bloodshed. He forbade us to commit abominations and to speak lies, and to devour the property of orphans, to vilify chaste women. He commanded us to worship God alone and not to associate anything with Him ----- Thereupon our people attacked us, treated us harshly and seduced us from our faith to try to make us go back to the worship of idols instead of the worship of God and to regard as lawful the evil deeds once committed. So when they got the better of us, treated us unjustly and circumscribed our lives and came between us and our religion, we came to your country, having chosen you above all others. Here we have been happy in your protection and we hope that we shall not be treated unjustly while we are with you.....” (10)

Content analyses:

The address of Jaafar (RA) states:

1. The Oneness of Allah and Prophethood (PBUH).
2. True status of Jesus (PBUH) and Virgin Mary.
3. The worst evil customs of the Arab society before Islam.
4. Keen interest in the positive change in the society by eliminating evil and inculcating moral and social upliftment as preached by the prophet of Islam.
5. Effective communication and presentation of Islam removed the misperceptions and after this the whole scenario changed.

Roots of Christian – Muslim dialogue and alliance in the sources of Shariah:

Pluralism is the essence of Islam as revealed in the Holy Quran and practiced by Holy Prophet (PBUH) and the early caliphs. The primary sources of Islamic Law are the Holy Quran, which approves the pluralistic approaches and utmost tolerance at all levels in life with all human beings including Christians and Jews. The Sunnah (Muhammad’s (PBUH) deeds as a normative model). The life of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a classic example of cooperation, reconciliation, tolerance, acceptance of pluralism, love of humanity and upholding human equality- irrespective of caste, creed and of color. The secondary sources analogical reasoning and the consensus of the community should be taken in the

light of Quran and Sunnah, and any judgment, decision and juristic opinion which is contradictory with the Quran and Sunnah should not be accepted in regard to Muslim and Christian relationship. Some examples of this reflection are :

i) Status of Jesus (PBUH), son of Mary in the Holy Quran: Islam is part of the Abrahamic tradition which means that Islam is built on the same foundations as Judaism and Christianity. The Holy Quran places Jesus (PBUH) in the same line of prophethood as Moses (PBUH) and Abraham (PBUH). All Muslims believe and are taught to respect and love all prophets who were sent with the same message of Islam i.e. Kindness, love, charity and toleration. A person cannot be a Muslim without believing in the virgin birth and miracles of Jesus Christ. "Jesus" is mentioned by name in twenty five places as a righteous prophet in the Holy Quran. Esposito says: "Mary is mentioned more times in the Quran than in the entire New Testament and more biographical information about her is contained in the Quran than in the New Testament".(11)

ii) Emphasis on dialogue and alliance with Abrahamic faiths: Islam's Universal call for dialogue for all times. Allah says in the Quran *قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ تَعَالَوْا إِلَى كَلِمَةٍ سَوَاءٍ بَيْنَنَا وَبَيْنَكُمْ* (3:64): "Say: 'People of the Book'! Come to common terms which are between us." To show respect for Abrahamic religions, Muslims are required to find true common grounds and also to show their kindness, sincerity, truth and goodness for others.

iii) Compulsion in matter of faith is forbidden: Allah says in the Holy Quran *لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ ۚ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الْغَيِّ* (2:256) "There is no compulsion in religion. Verily, the right path has become distinct from the wrong path." Ibn-e-Kathir says in explanation of the phrase of this verse: "Do not force anyone to become Muslim, for Islam is plain and clear and its proofs and evidence are plain and clear. Therefore, there is no need to force anyone to embrace Islam" (12). Shaikh Al Azhar Tantawi says in the same context: "Verily there is no compulsion and coercion in the matters of doctrines and religions". (13) He further says that Sharia protects life, property and honour of non – Muslims by all means (14).

The Qur'an prescribes religious tolerance by clearly and emphatically stating that there should be no compulsion in religion but some western scholars have reservations on such verses such as Bernard Lewis writes: "They (Muslims) did however see a certain form of tolerance an obligation of the dominant Islamic religion." There is no compulsion in religion" runs a much quoted verse in the Quran(2:256) and this was generally interpreted by Muslim Jurists and rulers to authorize a limited measure of tolerance for certain specified other religious

beliefs, without of course in any way questioning or compromising the primacy of Islam and the supremacy of Muslims.”(15)

iv) **Recommendation for peace and reconciliation:** Allah says in the Holy Quran وَالصُّلْحُ خَيْرٌ □ (4:128) : “Reconciliation is the best”. It was revealed on a specific occasion related to domestic relationship between the Holy Prophet (PBUH) and his wife Sawdah but in its general applications it means that peace and reconciliation should be established at all levels.

v) **Freedom for religion and co-existence in the Quran:** The Holy Quran لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَ لِيَ دِينِ (109:6) says, O Prophet (PBUH), tell the people “To you be your religion, to me be mine.” According to Ibn-e- Kathir “The idolators worship other than Allah, with acts of worship that Allah has not allowed. This is why the Messenger (PBUH) said to them, “To you be your religion and to me my religion”. This is similar to Allah’s statement: “and if they believe you, say: “For me are my deeds and for you are your deeds! You are innocent of what I do and I am innocent of what you do” (10:41) and He said: “To us our deeds and to you your deeds” (28:55). Al- Bukhari said, It has been said: “To you be your religion” means disbelief. “and to me my religion” means Islam”(16)

vi) **Religion is a person’s own concern:** Belief in this or that religion is a person’s own concern. That is why the Holy Quran وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُؤْمِنْ وَمَنْ شَاءَ فَلْيُكْفُرْ □ (18:29) says: “This is the truth from your lord so let him who wishes believe and let him who wishes disbelieve”. According to Ibn-e- Kathir “Allah Says to His Messenger Muhammad (PBUH) say to the people what I have brought to you from your Lord is the truth in which there is no confusion and doubt.”(17)

vii) **Diversity is willed by the Transcendent:** The verse instructs us that diversity is willed by Transcendent. Allah Says: وَلَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَمَعَهُمْ عَلَى الْهُدَى فَلَا تَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْجَاهِلِينَ (6:35) “Had God so willed, He would have united them (human beings) in guidance, so do not be among the ignorant” Ali bin Abi Talha reported that Ibn Abbas said about Allah’s statement “Had God so willed, He would have united them (human beings) in guidance”. The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) was eager that all people believe and be guided to follow him. Allah told him that only those whose happiness Allah has written in the first Dhikr will believe. (18)

viii) **Confirmation of acceptance of Pluralistic values:** There is a clear statement about pluralism in the Holy Quran. Allah says: وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَأَمَنَّ مِنَ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلَّهُمْ □ (10:99) “If your Lord had so willed, everyone on earth would have believed. Is it for you to compel people to be

believers?”. Ibn-e- Kathir explains “meaning O Muhammad, if had been the will of your Lord, He would make all the people of the earth believe in what you have brought to them. But Allah has wisdom in what He does. Force them to believe it is not for you to do that. You are not commanded to do that either” (19)

ix) Purpose of diversity of religions, nations and people is a test: Allah says: لِكُلِّ جَعَلْنَا مِنْكُمْ شِرْعَةً وَ مِنْهَاجًا ۚ وَ لَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ لَجَعَلَكُمْ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً وَ لَكِنْ لِنَبْلُوَكُمْ فِي مَا آتَيْنَاكُمْ فَاسْتَبِقُوا الْخَيْرَاتِ (5:48) “Unto every one of you we have appointed a (different) law and way of life. If God had willed, He would have made you one community but things are as they are to test you in what he has given you. So compete with each other in doing good” This Ayah means, Allah has instituted different Laws to test His servants’ obedience to what He legislates for them, thus, He rewards or punishes them according to their actions and what they intend. (20). The revelation teaches that the purpose of these differences is to test us in order to discover what we going to do with what has been revealed to us: the last commandment is to use these differences to “compete in doing good. Diversity of religions, nations and people is a test because it requires that we learn to manage difference, which is in itself essential.

x) Acknowledgement of inevitability of cultural diversity: Allah says in the Holy Quran

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا (49: 13): “Verily we created you from a single pair, male and female, and made you into Nations and tribes, so that you may know each other” This implies that Islam recognizes diversity of culture and capabilities. Mutual understanding in all forms of human activities is clearly mentioned in this verse.

Removal of misperception about some Quranic verses:

Articles written on “sword verses” extracted from Quran such as Allah says : “And when the sacred months are over, kill the disbelievers wherever you may meet them, and take them captive, and besiege them, and lie in wait for them in every suitable ambush” (9:5) to demonstrate that there is no room for religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue in Islam and Muslims cannot be loyal citizens in a non-Islamic state are aimed at developing theories of hate and legitimating discrimination against Muslims.

This method of extracting individual verses of the Quran without regard for their context, the history of their revelation and their interpretation, in order to prove an Islamic duty to wage aggressive war, is as if one were to interpret Jesus words of sword, fire and division “I did not come to bring peace but the sword” (21) and “I have come to bring fire on earth...” (22) and “Do you think I came to bring peace

on earth? No, I tell you, but division,” (23) as proof of Christian belligerence. Esposito says: “Like all scriptures, Islamic sacred texts must be read within the social and political contexts in which they were revealed. It is not surprising that the Quran, like the Hebrew Scriptures or Old Testament, has verses that address fighting and the conduct of war.” (24)

Verses related to the prohibition of relationship with non- Muslims:

Presently, some scholars have highlighted and repeatedly quoted these verses in which friendship between Muslims and the people of the book is prohibited and forbidden out of context for example Hud 11:113, Al Imran 3 :28, Al Mumtahina 60 :1, Al Mujadila 58 :22. They have tried to prove that therefore any relations leading to cooperation with non- Muslims is not allowed leading to misunderstanding and strife in today's world. This attitude is against the true spirit of Islam. In the commentary of verses of Al Mumtahina 8-9 an Egyptian scholar Muhammad Abdu writes in that the second Khalifa Umar (R A) and later Khalifas who came after him delegated official work to Romans (Christians). Even the Ummayyad and Abbasid rulers did the same. They appointed Christians and Jews for their official work. Many ambassadors of the Ottoman Empire were Christians. (25) Another Egyptian Scholar Rashid Raza writes that the verses related to not having close friendship with Jews was only applicable to Jews of those time who acted against Islam and not to all Jews in general. Therefore, in those days, considering the situation, it was forbidden to seek help in certain matters where secrecy was required. Later on, times changed and Jews became supporters of Muslims. In the conquest of Spain the Jews were on the side of Muslims not Christians. (26)

Comparative analysis of the views of scholars: Cooperation and good relationship not only with Christian and Jews but also all other non-Muslims is allowed and encouraged provided they are open and fair towards Islam and Muslims. All verses related to the prohibition of relationship, trust and cooperation with non-Muslims apply only if it is certain that they can bring damage to Islam and Muslims. If it is contrary to this, then taking help from them, having friendships and educational and scientific cooperation, delegating responsibilities, seeking guidance and providing and taking services is lawful and legal. There are common areas in both religions. Christians and Muslims can work together in those common areas which will promote understanding, harmony and goodwill.

Roots of Christian-Muslim dialogue & alliance in the second source of Sharia
The Sunnah: Dialoguing is the tradition of Holy Prophet (PBUH) and part of Dawa. He had dialogue with people of different faiths. He taught the ethics and

principles of dialogue. He gave permission to his companions for dialogue and they held dialogue successfully. There are also many examples in the life of the Prophet in which he communicated, interacted and cooperated with people of other faiths in the social, political, economic and other arenas as well. Some examples are:

i) Attitude of total acceptance towards all: The Arabian Peninsula during the time of the Prophet (PBUH) was a region in which various faiths were present. There were Christians, Jews, Zoroastrians, polytheists, and others not affiliated with any religion. The Prophet (PBUH) who founded the classless and universal society of Islam actually brought various nations together and removed their tribal prejudices. The Holy prophet (PBUH) said: "Peoples are like teeth of a comb"(27). He said: "All mankind is Allah's family; the best among you in the sight of Allah is he who is human towards his family."(28) He said: "You are children of Adam and Adam was created out of clay."(29).

ii) Humane treatment towards Christian delegation of Najran: Once the Prophet received a delegation of sixty Christians in Madinah from the region of Najran, then a part of Yemen, at his mosque. As the prayer time came, they had no place of their own to worship so he invited them to offer their prayers at Masjid-e-Nabwi., they faced towards the east and prayed (30) This was a great example of tolerance for all religion. The most significant charter of tolerance was granted by the prophet of Islam to Christians.

iii) Practice of excellent treatment towards non-Muslim neighbours: Great importance is attached to neighbors (whatever their religion) and to treat them nicely and to send them food items. Jibrael (A.S) emphasized good behavior towards neighbors so much so that the Prophet (PBUH) thought they would be heirs in the legacy. A Jew lived in the neighborhood of Abdullah bin Umar (RA). Once he slaughtered a goat and asked his family members if they had sent some meat to their Jew neighbors. He added that the Prophet (PBUH) observed, "Jibrail (A.S) advised me to have good behavior towards the neighbors so much so that I thought that they would be included among the heirs for sharing the legacy." (31).

v) A warning to Muslims who misbehave with people of other faiths. The Prophet (PBUH) said: "Beware! Whoever is cruel and hard on non-Muslim minority, or curtails his rights, or burdens them with more than they can bear, or takes anything from them against their free will; I (Prophet Muhammad) will complain against that person on the Day of Judgment." (32) That's why the second Caliph of Islam Umar (RA) just before his death emphasized that "I entreat the succeeding Caliph to show excellent treatment towards Zimmis (non-Muslim citizens of an Islamic State)" (33).

vi) Treaty with Jews and formation of constitution of Madina: This Treaty was a good example of peaceful coexistence of Muslims, Jews, Christians and polytheists in Madina. The important step Muhammad (PBUH) took on arriving in Madinah was to conclude a treaty with the neighboring Jewish tribes for mutual help and defence of the city. The Charter of Madina was framed by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) himself and was called the first Constitution of Islam in the Islamic State of Madina. According to this Constitution the Muslims and non Muslims (Zimmis) were given the same equal rights of safety and protection. Even the political terminology used is the same for both Muslims and non-Muslims. (34) Esposito (2009) says: "Religiously, Islam proved a more tolerant religion, providing greater religious freedom for Jews and indigenous Christians"(35)

vii) Correspondence with great emperors: In his letters the Prophet (PBUH) interacted on an intercultural level, after 6th Hijra, he wrote letters to some rulers to the East & West inviting them to the faith of Islam. He sent emissaries to the Roman Emperor, the Persian Emperor, the ruler of Egypt, the King of Abyssinia and the Chief of Syria inviting them to Islam. Al Blazari mentions that Manazar Bin Sawi was the ruler of Bahrain. Muhammad (PBUH) sent a letter to him, inviting him to Islam. The letter had such a tremendous impact on him, that he embraced Islam almost immediately. A great number of the people of Bahrain also embraced Islam with great fidelity. (36)

viii) Tolerance on the Conquest of Makkah: On the occasion of the Conquest of Makkah the prophet (PBUH) entered Makkah with a force of ten to twelve thousand followers. There were many Makkans whom he (PBUH) could have justly taken revenge from on that day but he showed magnanimity, even to his worst enemies, by declaring General Amnesty. History has no record of such tolerant and magnanimous behavior. Armstrong (2006) said while analyzing the conquest of Makkah: "He (Muhammad PBUH) had no desire for bloody reprisal .Nobody was made to accept Islam nor do they seem to have felt any pressure to do so. Reconciliation was still Muhammad's objective". (37)

At the end of Prophetic mission the Holy Prophet (PBUH) reminded the people about equal political and legal status for non Muslim on the occasion of the last Sermon in 10th Hijra (632 AD) and said: "Your Lord is one and all human beings are Adam's children. An Arab is no better than a non-Arab. In return, a non-Arab is no better than an Arab. A red faced man is not better than a black faced one except in piety and Adam was created out of clay."

Roots of Christian – Muslim dialogue and alliance in History:

In the contemporary era, religious and political pluralism has been a major issue in the Muslim world. The history of Christianity and Islam has been one of both conflict and coexistence. Esposito gave many positive examples of Muslim-Christian debate and dialogue some of them are:

1. Began in the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).
2. The fifth Sunni chaliph, Muawiyyah (RA) (ruled 661-669), regularly sent invitations to the contending Jacobite and Maronite Christians to come to the royal court to discuss their differences.
3. Debates involving both Muslims and Jews occurred in Spanish Muslim courts, and a sixteenth-century interreligious theological discussions between Catholic priests and Muslim clerics was presided over by the Mughal Emperor Akbar. These debates were not always conducted between “equals” (indeed, many were held precisely in order to “prove,” as was also the case for dialogue initiated by Christians). The fact that the debate was permitted and encouraged, however, indicates some degree of open exchange between faiths, a significant stage of educational and cultural achievement in the Muslim world.
4. During the Crusades, despite their conflict, Muslims Tolerated the practice of Christianity-an example that was not emulated by the other side.
5. In the thirteenth century some treaties between Christian and Muslims granted Christians free access to sacred places then reoccupied by Islam.
6. The great Christian saint Francis of Assisi met the Muslim Leader Salah al-Din’s nephew Sultan al –Malik al-Kamil in 1219. The sultan granted freedom of worship to his more than thirty thousand Christian prisoners when hostilities were suspended, as well as offering them the choice of returning to their own countries or fighting in his armies.
7. The Ottoman Empire is a prime example of the positive treatment of religious minorities in a Muslim majority context. The Ottomans officially recognized four religiously based communities, known as *millet*: Greek Orthodox, Armenian Gregorian, Muslim and Jewish. Under the millet system, Islam assumed the prime position, but each other millet was placed under the authority of its own religious leaders and permitted to follow its own religious laws.
8. When Muslims conquered Byzantium, they were welcomed by some Christian sects and groups, who were persecuted as heretics by “official” Christianity, that is, Catholicism. Many Christians welcomed a Muslim rule that gave them more freedom to practice their faith and imposed lighter taxes. Despite initial fears, the Muslim conquerors proved to be far more tolerant than imperial Christianity had been, granting religious freedom to indigenous Christian churches and Jews.

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9. Christians had good positions in an Islamic State like John of Damascus held positions of prominence in the royal courts.(38)

General principles for holding dialogues: The Holy Quran not only issues a call to dialogue but also insists on the form it should take and the way in which it should be conducted. It should not simply be an exchange of information; it should also be a way of being and of speaking, an attitude. Allah says in the Holy Quran (16:125) "And discuss with them in the best way." Allah says (29: 46): "And do not argue with the people of the Book (Christian & Jews) except in the best manner". It means that dialogue must be with Christian and Jews in the most courteous manner.

Peace and Dialogue initiative in the world today:

This century hopefully will be called "The age of reconciliation and dialogue". Efforts have been made from prominent figures from Muslim and Christian camps like John L. Esposito and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, M. Fathullah Gulen all around the world to resolve differences at micro and macro levels. In October 2007 an open letter of 38 Muslim scholars and call from Muslim Religious Leaders to His Holiness Pope Benedict xvi and Leaders of Christian Churches, everywhere, states: "Muslims and Christians together make up well over half of the world's population. Without peace and justice between these two religious communities, there can be no meaningful peace in the world. The future of the world depends on peace between Muslims and Christians. The basis for this peace and understanding already exists. It is part of the very foundational principles of both faiths: love of the One God, and love of the neighbour. These principles are found over and over again in the sacred texts of Islam and Christianity. The Unity of God, the necessity of love for Him, and the necessity of love of the neighbour is thus the common ground between Islam and Christianity". When this report was launched initially 138 leading Islamic Scholars from all over the world became signatories. Later on 161 more prominent Muslim figures endorsed the publication. A total of 299 great Islamic scholars agreed to the ideas presented in this letter.

A very positive response was given by famous Christian theologians from all over the world such as Professor David Ford, Director, Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme, Dr Rowan Williams, The Archbishop of Canterbury, Rev. Dr Samuel Kobia, General Secretary, World council of Churches, The World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC), The Baptist World Alliance, Mennonite Church USA. Over 300 leading Christian scholars from Yale gave a very positive response when "A common World" was published as a full page advertisement in the "New York Times". (39)

King Abdullah bin Abdul Aziz Al Saud of Saudi Arabia, called on a “dialogue” among 57 Muslim heads of States in Makkah, four years ago. In November 2008, Senior Vatican and Islamic Scholars had a dialogue to improve relationships between the world’s largest faiths. Pope Benedict xvi addressed the participants in the first Seminar of the Catholic-Muslim forum on Nov 6’ 2008 for greater understanding between Muslims and Christians. U.S. President Obama has started seriously talking about a dialogue between the two faiths keeping in mind all the aspects that can lead to reconciliation. As a Democratic presidential candidate Obama said in his speech in Berlin on August 24, 2008. “Tear down the wall of racism”. He spoke about breaking down the walls (like the literal Berlin wall of the past) between peoples of different religions. U.S. President Obama said in Cairo, Egypt, on 4th June, 2009. “Islam is a part of Europe and there is a mosque in every state of our Union”.

Conclusion: We cannot have a different world for people of separate faiths. We have to live together in this world, so we must come together to save the planet. Islam respects diversity. Dialogue is the best way to communicate with people of other faiths. Islamic teachings show that any human being, whether Muslim or non-Muslim, is valuable. As far as Islam is concerned there is no force or compulsion in religion. Islamic Law is based on dialogue and reconciliation and not on discrimination, intolerance and violence. Building solid bridges between Muslims and Christians needs more substantial, honest and united efforts in order to demolish the ingrained prejudices against each other. We must appreciate the sensitivity of the current global situation and make honest and sincere endeavors to manage, minimize and resolve conflicts and ensure peace. The question still remains unanswered that why inspite of the permission of Sharia for dialogue, cooperation with Christians and many other efforts for global harmony, the gulf between the Muslim and the Western world continues to grow.

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